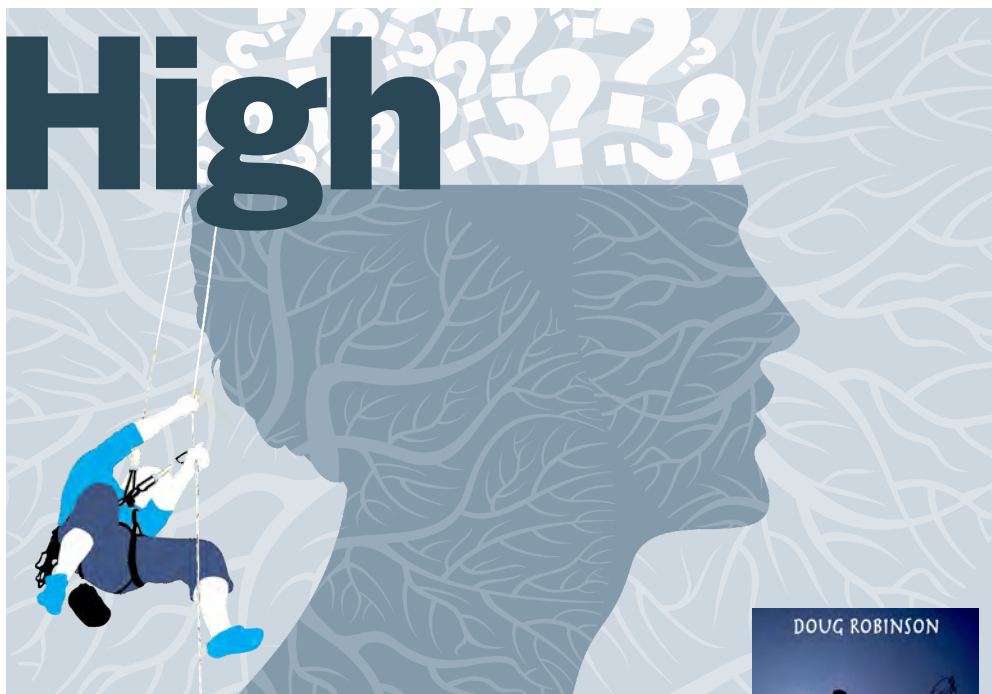


# Climbing

BY KELSIE BOWMAN

## Get High

**Why do you love to climb?** We've asked countless climbers this very question over the years. Typically, they'll answer by recalling the first day they climbed a route, shrug and say, "After that, I was hooked." And that addiction latches on, lasting decades.



**L**ongtime climber and author Doug Robinson, who lives in the stunning Sierra's, says it's a good addiction and, scientifically, it makes sense. In his new book *The Alchemy of Action*, Robinson takes a look at what happens in climbers' brains when they rock climb, and on a recent visit to Chattanooga, he took the time to explain it to local climbers at High Point Climbing and Fitness.

The project has spanned over the past 50 years of Robinson's nearly 70 years of life, and it has unorthodox beginnings. Robinson first thought to study the subject the first time he got high on marijuana. "I had been a long distance runner and climber for years at that point," he says. "That moment really was the moment when I realized, I know this experience. I've been here before. I've gotten a similar perception and emotional condition from climbing."

He was fascinated. "It was odd because I was doing a brand

new thing and yet it seemed so familiar," says Robinson. "It's no exaggeration to say it's been a lifetime project to find out what that connection is."

Over years of research, hours spent pouring over century-old accounts of euphoric mountaintop epiphanies as well as conversations with fellow climbers, Robinson details in his book



"Lots of people have had these experiences and talked about it around campfires for decades, but nobody had ever gotten into the research behind it before. I spent years doing that and I am excited about what I found, so I'm hoping that by spreading the word about what I've discovered in my research, we can enrich the conversation."

—Doug Robinson

PHOTO: KYRA ROBINSON

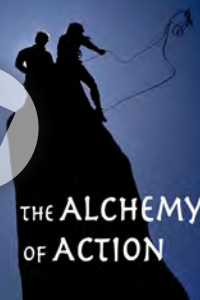
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how five key "ingredients" in the brain cause the high that comes along with rock climbing, and many other adventure sports.

"Your brain is putting out a hormonal cocktail that produces these results," Robinson says, naming noradrenaline, serotonin, dopamine, Anandamide and DMT as the ingredients. "All of these having a little dash of fear mixed in helps to increase them, too." Most adventure sports require a bit of risk, he explains, and that adds to the high.

"I'm pushing 70 now and I'm still addicted to climbing, and I still trail run. All of these things grab you and they turn your life around," Robinson says. "People's lives truly do get trapped to addictions to drugs. If there is an alternative that is healthy and wonderful, then what's wrong with this picture?"

DOUG ROBINSON



### In the Mix

**Noradrenaline:** natural wake-up juice

**Dopamine:** the pleasure hormone

**Serotonin:** A natural antidepressant

**Anandamide:** a marijuana-like hormone and the supposed cause of runner's high

**DMT:** a potent psychedelic, recently found occurring naturally in human brain tissue

\*Robinson says these findings are all cutting-edge, and there is still a lot to be learned about the human brain as well as what contributes to this "high."